

Dissecting Transnational Rebels: The Dispossessed Peoples Effect

By Troy C. Homesley

A Thesis submitted to the faculty  
of the University of North Carolina  
in partial fulfillment of the require-  
ments of a degree with Honors in  
Political Science.

Adviser: Dr. Navin Bapat

April 10, 2014

Approved By:

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# **Dissecting Transnational Rebels:**

## **The Dispossessed Peoples Effect**

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the intricate relationship between dispossessed peoples and the occurrence of international crises. I contend that the existence of dispossessed peoples - ethno-political groups who reside in border areas and have been systematically denied crucial political, cultural and economic rights afforded to more incorporated individuals within their state - increase the likelihood of international crises. This contention arises from previous research that has shown territorial claims and rebel groups to be two of the primary accelerants of international conflict. Dispossessed peoples stand at the intersection of these two accelerants, placing them in a precarious sphere of international relations. Dispossessed peoples may threaten secession, co-optation by bordering states who might hold kindred groups, or cooperation with aggressor states. Additionally, dispossessed peoples are at a high risk of morphing into transnational rebel groups as they attempt to recover power through informal means when formal political power is denied or unachievable. To test this theory, I have compiled data from the Minorities at Risk database and the Correlates of War Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes database for the years 1940-2003. A series of empirical tests reveal that, globally, the effect of dispossessed peoples on international crises is statistically insignificant. However, in specific regions, the results vary. In the Middle East, dispossessed peoples have a net calming effect on the occurrence of international crises, while in the Americas, Europe and Africa, dispossessed peoples increase the likelihood of international crises. I conclude by discussing the policy implications of these findings.

## Introduction

A well known catalyst of international conflict is the existence of non-state actors, and more specifically transnational rebels, in the border regions of states (Salehyan 2009). Salehyan defines transnational rebel groups as "armed opposition groups whose operations are not confined to the geographic territory of the nation-state(s) that they challenge" (Salehyan 2009, 15). His research finds that where external rebel bases in neighboring territories and militarized interstate disputes coincided, rebels were cited as a major factor leading to conflict 83 percent of the time (Salehyan 2009, 110). Salehyan also found that the existence of external rebel bases alone increases the probability of conflict in any given year by 8 percent. This finding illustrates the impact that transnational rebels have on conflict.

A crucial subset of non-state actors that has received little scholarly attention is that of dispossessed peoples. I define dispossessed peoples as ethno-political groups residing in border areas who have been systematically denied economic equality and political rights that are afforded to more deeply incorporated individuals and groups within the state. Dispossessed peoples are unincorporated—politically, economically and sometimes culturally—into the center of the state. In this way, their ability to exercise political power is limited. This lack of power is what makes their case especially interesting. I test whether the existence of a non-state actor in the form of a group of dispossessed peoples in the border region of a state affects the likelihood of militarized interstate disputes of any kind. This question arises from an interest in whether a group whose formal political and economic power appears weak is able to exercise a

discernable effect on the choices of the larger state, and sometimes, global region, in which it resides.

Solving this puzzle requires unpacking terms such as non-state actors and transnational rebel groups. I choose to focus on dispossessed peoples as a group that stands at the cross-section of territorial claims and a group of people are especially susceptible to morphing into rebel groups, colluding with other extra-state organizations such as terrorist groups, or joining kindred ethnic brethren in nearby states to launch secessionist movements. Because dispossessed peoples lack access to the rights and privileges of those more fully incorporated into the state, I contend that they occupy a precarious position that states are especially sensitive towards. This position is made all the more precarious because dispossessed peoples are also ethnic groups.

James D. Fearon (1998) discusses the choices that ethnic groups face in detail. Fearon uses the example of Croats in Serbia following the fall of Soviet Russia. Using this example, he points to a commitment problem as the underlying cause of ethnic conflicts. When a minority is created within a newly created state, the minority can choose to launch a secessionist movement early on while the state is consolidating resources, or hope that the majority is willing to share benefits fairly upon consolidation of the state. However, Fearon points out that majorities within these states often face a credible commitment problem, they cannot credibly commit to the protection of minority rights because their bargaining power is automatically increased with the consolidation of the state. Thus, Fearon argues that minorities often take the opportunity to push for secession before a constitution is drawn up and states consolidate their power. This tendency is amplified when the majority is a nested minority, or when the minority has

brethren in nearby countries. Examples include Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, Serbs in Croatia and Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Moore and Davis (1998) go into further detail about the choices available to ethnic groups. They find that ethnic groups create transnational alliances that behave similarly to international alliances. Additionally, they agree with prior literature that suggests that interstate conflicts originating from ethnic tensions are different from other types of interstate conflict because they result in higher levels of violence and "involve higher perceived threats to basic values" (Moore and Davis 1998, 91). Ethnic alliances are also attractive for brethren states and ethnic minorities. When an ethnic group holds a majority in one state and a brethren minority in a neighboring state, the potential oppression of the minority group provides an opportunity for political elites in the majority country to whip up political support by championing the grievances of the neighboring brethren minority group. Meanwhile, the minority group has a real interest in forging a strong alliance with the majority brethren state in order to credibly threaten the potential for secession or collusion with the neighboring state. In these ways, ethnicity matters because it increases the likelihood of conflict and creates conflict that is highly salient for each party involved.

To provide a concrete example of these political choices and motivations, one might consider the case of Kurdistan. Kurds, one of the largest nations without a state, live in an area that spans from Western Iran to Northern Iraq to Northern Syria to Southeastern Turkey. Kurds also stand as a model example of a dispossessed group because they occupy the border region in each state that they inhabit and have been subject to systemic discrimination and oppression culturally, economically and politically.

Over the years, and especially since the founding of the Turkish state under Kemal Ataturk, Kurdish groups throughout the region have found themselves at the center of international conflict, most prominently the Iran-Iraq war.

Kurds have also been at the center of more subdued and ongoing conflicts, including regular Turkish air raids on the semi-autonomous Northern region of Iraq known as Iraqi Kurdistan. More recently, Kurds have found themselves grasping for various partnerships in an extremely divided Syria, hoping to support a contender for power who will ultimately respect and protect Kurdish rights, or even hoping to carve out a region of their own (Solomon, 2014).

I use the Kurdish example because it exemplifies the niche area that dispossessed groups occupy. Unlike more incorporated groups and individuals, dispossessed peoples cannot necessarily rely on the over-arching state to protect and cultivate their rights, political power and economic stability because of the credibility problem proposed by Fearon (1998). Instead, dispossessed groups must make a concerted effort to develop a range of options through connections with bordering states, extra-state organizations such as transnational rebel groups (TNRs) and the international community. This calculus often looks different for dispossessed peoples depending on their political outlook.

For instance, Kurds in Northern Iraq chose to assist and complement American forces during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and continue to assist the United States in Iraq to this day. In that case, Kurds strategically identified the United States as the best potential option for support. Today in Northern Syria, the calculus for Kurds is much different, and its various permutations have not yet fully materialized. But, in contrast to Iraq in 2003, it is clear that the assistance of the United States is not a major consideration. In

this example, we find that it is possible for dispossessed peoples to access a range of options. Furthermore, the option that is ultimately chosen can be, and often is, different or even contradictory depending on the political landscape during the time in question.

Further fragmentation of decision-making can be seen on a regional basis, with dispossessed peoples in one country making different choices than dispossessed peoples in a nearby country, even if they are descendants of the same ethno-political group. Dispossessed peoples assert their power through an internationalized range of choices, as opposed to more incorporated groups, whose political choices within the domestic system might be broad, but whose patron-client and cooperation decisions are rather limited. This reality is what states perceive as a threat when considering dispossessed peoples.

This research is important for international relations scholars because it might provide a better understanding of why conflict originates in some border areas and point towards the causal mechanisms that bring about such conflict. Understanding these mechanisms and recognizing the dispossessed peoples effect as a contributing factor to conflict will allow scholars in the field to better understand the likelihood of conflict arising and the possibilities for avoiding such conflict when the conditions provided in this question apply. Additionally, I hope that the method of discerning clearly between various types of non-state actors is a choice that other scholars recognize as a useful and productive means of interpreting the effect of non-state actors on international conflict.

In order to test this theory, I rely primarily on quantitative evidence gathered from the Correlates of War (COW) Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes data and the Minorities at Risk (MAR) database. Additionally, I create an indicator for dispossessed peoples based on variables such as economic disadvantage, political disadvantage and

political differentials when the group is compared to other, more incorporated groups within the state. This indicator takes into account systemic and societal attempts to oppress or dispossess the group in question.

Below, I provide an overview of existing research on transnational rebel groups, the role of territory in international crises and the role that nationalism plays for dispossessed peoples. The next section provides a description of the theory and causal mechanisms that explain the dispossessed peoples effect. This section details the logical progression of the theoretical framework that explains why this theory is likely to hold. The following section explains my research design, including the creation of my dataset and the reasoning behind the coding of new variables. The final section provides analysis of the data and an evaluation of the findings.

## **Literature Review**

It is well known that the presence of non-state actors in the form of transnational rebel groups increases the likelihood of international conflict (Salehyan 2009). It is also known that territorial claims are a key trigger of international crises (Senese 2005, 773). Separately, these two factors are known to impact the likelihood of international crises. Dispossessed peoples inhabit both of these spheres, often vying for some sort of power by exercising threats of secession, co-optation by bordering states or cohesion with and sometimes transition into transnational rebel groups. In this way, dispossessed peoples are at the intersection of two of the leading factors in the rise of international crises.

### **Territorial Claims, Borders, Contiguity and Conflict**

Research on territorial conflicts among contiguous states is abundant. Senese (2005, 773) reveals that territorial disputes are a more consistent source of conflict than



mere contiguity and that territorial claims are strongest at the onset of war. Reed and Chiba (2010) agree that territory is an important factor in conflicts and disputes amongst states. They attribute this to the highly salient nature of territorial claims for peoples and governments of both states involved. Territorial claims make states more willing to engage in conflict because they are likely to pay closer attention to events that are in close proximity to their territorial front, since these events may seem more threatening or urgent.

A large amount of evidence has also shown that territorial disputes are the most dangerous type of dispute in international conflict. Work by Vasquez and Henehan (Cashman 2014, 245) reveals that territorial disputes, of all dispute types, are the most likely to escalate from the dispute level to the war level. Paul Huth (Cashman 2014, 246) follows up on this finding in an attempt to explain why territorial disputes were more likely to escalate to war. Huth's findings show that ethnic irredentist issues and national unification issues, and to a lesser degree strategic issues, motivates states to escalate conflict from disputes to wars in conflicts involving territory.

It is important to note that the findings reviewed above, as well as the findings of John Vasquez (Cashman 2014, 240), reveal that proximity is not nearly as robust as territorial disputes in explaining international conflict between states. What, then, makes territorial disputes so salient for states? There are competing theories on this point. According to Gregory Cashman, "three types of answers appear relevant: (1) human territoriality, (2) characteristics inherent in the nature of the territory itself, and (3) domestic and international political considerations" (Cashman 2014, 241). Each of these areas can elevate the salience of territorial disputes in the eyes of politicians, military

leaders and citizens. The second explanation is perhaps most germane to my discussion. This answer includes strategic resources, geographic strategic importance, and more intangible factors such as ethnic homelands or important cultural and religious sites. One of the key inherent features of a territory is the people who occupy that territory. This brings up another compounding factor in the rise of international crises: rebel groups, ethnic groups and nationalism. The existence of such groups is certain to increase the salience of territorial disputes.

### Rebels, Ethnic Groups and Nationalism

Salehyan (2008, 787) and Lee (2001, 77), among other scholars, have detailed the effects of refugees on interstate conflict. Salehyan finds that an influx of refugees increases the likelihood of militarized interstate disputes. Lee outlines various reasons for this increase, including increased conflict between the host and source countries. But dispossessed peoples often occupy territory that they hope to one day make their own, unlike most refugees. Additionally, dispossessed peoples often hold common ethnic heritage, some dispossessed peoples may even be classified as rebels; unlike most refugees. Thus, it is important to look at more than refugees alone when considering the example of dispossessed peoples.

Salehyan (2009) completed a detailed study on the effects of Transnational Rebel Groups (TNRs) on international conflicts. His results show that TNRs increase the odds of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), especially when TNRs are provided with external sanctuaries in a neighboring state and when TNRs receive transfers of arms and finances. Again, dispossessed peoples are not just TNRs, but they are also ethnic groups, a subject that Stephen Van Evera focuses on heavily. Van Evera studies "stateless

nations - ethno-religious communities that do not have a state of their own, but live (as minorities) within the boundaries of a state dominated by other national groups" (Cashman 2014, 224). Van Evera views nationalism narrowly, requiring that a community seek its own independent state in order for it to act in a nationalistic fashion. Van Evera identifies two paths to inter-state conflict instigated by nationalism: 1.) attempts at creating an independent state lead to secession, which could lead to international conflict or 2.) a state attempts to annex a national diaspora or oppress domestic minority groups, causing external states to intervene (Cashman 2014, 225).

Benjamin Miller provides an extension of Van Evera's hypotheses using the state-to-nation imbalance theory. The most important portion of Miller's findings for my research involves his identification of three dyad types: majority-majority dyads, majority-minority dyads and minority-minority dyads. Woodwell's (2004, 220) research reveals that those dyads most likely to experience international conflict are majority-majority and majority-minority dyads. Miller's analysis takes into account important factors such as proximity and territory as well:

"Miller argues that territorial issues are much more likely to escalate to war if they involve state-to-nation imbalances. This is because those territorial issues tied to nationalism and ethnicity tend to be less divisible. Nationalist aspirations raise strong passions, making deterrence by stronger states problematic, as less powerful states might initiate violence regardless of their weakness" (Cashman 2014, 229).

In this portion of analysis, we find that Miller makes the important step of considering not only territory or contiguity, but goes further to explore the linkage between the territory and the people who occupy or hope to occupy such territory. This is also a crucial concept in my theoretical framework, for it provides the important connector between dispossessed peoples and the specific territory that they occupy.

Ethnic associations play yet another role in international conflict when a neighboring state is experiencing internal conflict. Internal conflict can lead to international conflict through outside intervention by a neighboring (or non-neighboring) state in favor of either the state or rebel groups. Cashman (2014, 218) notes that the most important factor that can affect the willingness of a state to intervene on behalf of or against another state experiencing internal conflict is usually based on ethno-cultural-linguistic associations between the intervening state and either the majority in the other state or a minority within that state.

The importance of rebels, ethnic groups and nationalistic aspirations, whether they be in the form of demands for a state of their own or more political and cultural freedom, cannot be understated. This factor is amplified when combined with the existence of a border area, as the chances for territorial disputes are elevated. Thus, I predict that countries that have dispossessed peoples are more likely to experience international crises.

I define a dispossessed group as an ethno-political group that has experienced systemic political and economic oppression and discrimination through the denial of specific political rights and economic freedoms. Additionally, dispossessed peoples are primarily located in the border region of the state that they inhabit, and view this territory as their regional base. Dispossessed peoples stand at the intersection of two of the leading accelerants of international conflict: territory and rebel groups who are unified by ethno-political commonality and nationalism. These dual characteristics, embodied simultaneously by dispossessed peoples, are likely to create a compounding effect upon

the likelihood of international crises. This is the primary reason I predict the existence of dispossessed peoples in border regions to increase the likelihood of international crises.

## **Theory**

Previous literature establishes that the frequency of conflicts between nations that do not share borders is lower. From this, I investigate the frequency of conflicts between states with dispossessed peoples versus those with groups that have been more fully co-opted, accepted and incorporated into their various states. In other words, I investigate whether there is a significant difference in the frequency of MIDs between contiguous dyads that have at least one dispossessed group within the dyad and those that have no dispossessed groups in the dyad:

Hypothesis 1: Dyads that have a dispossessed group within at least one country in the dyad are more likely to experience MIDs than are dyads with no dispossessed groups in either border area.

There are several intermediary links that create the overarching theoretical framework for this theory. In addition to the combination of two primary accelerants of conflict (territory and rebellious tendencies), I contend that areas inhabited by a dispossessed group are more likely to be inherently destabilized regions with several groups vying for political, cultural or governmental recognition and benefits. In some cases, these groups may even vie for a state of their own through secession. These regions are less likely to be stable because there is less attachment to the state, decreased governmental funding for common infrastructure, and higher rates of poverty and unemployment. In these areas, voting rates, citizenship rates and access to political power are likely to be lower for the dispossessed group, thus decreasing the importance of co-opting these groups for election to national political offices. This phenomenon

neutralizes the contested institutions problem proposed by Kurt Dassel (Cashman 2014, 211) in the region examined.

Additionally, dispossessed groups have several options regarding which entity they may wish to represent them in the future in the form of various states, rebel groups or otherwise. When these dispossessed groups are located in border areas, they are better able to leverage the possibility of allowing a foreign state to co-opt them or to threaten secession, thus threatening the territorial property on which they reside. In this manner, dispossessed peoples can grasp for otherwise absent political power by utilizing the territory they inhabit as a political bargaining chip. This increased possibility of co-optation by bordering states threatens the territorial holdings of the home state and thus increases the possibility for confrontation. Importantly, the draw towards conflict is not in support of the dispossessed peoples, but rather to ensure that the territory upon which they reside remains intact.

Further, as a result of the inherent destabilization and low political participation of dispossessed groups in border areas, national governments are less likely to be held accountable for human, economic or social losses incurred by the possibility of conflict with bordering nations in these areas. As a result, the overarching national government will be more willing to initiate or participate in conflict when dispossessed groups occupy the border areas that inevitably become the frontlines of international conflict with adjacent states.

This theory is also bolstered by a mechanism I term the buffer zone effect. I contend that border areas occupied by dispossessed peoples act as buffer zones that protect culturally, politically and economically incorporated groups living further within

the territory from the violence of international conflict. In addition, when border areas occupied by dispossessed peoples become the frontlines of international conflict, the national government is able to avoid heavy economic and political costs involved when conflicts affect groups important to the economic success of the state and the political success of the dominant groups.

The buffer zone effect also explains why states would be willing to participate in conflict in order to maintain territory. As reviewed above, territorial disputes are the most common cause of international conflict for various reasons. The buffer zone effect is yet another explanatory tool for why territorial conflict is so salient for states. States will be unwilling to relinquish buffer zones because of the added protection that the buffer territory provides for future conflicts. In this way, buffer zone areas provide strategic geographic protection, exponentially so when they are inhabited by dispossessed peoples because audience costs are minimized while the "rally 'round the flag" effect can still be utilized with more incorporated groups in the state. Importantly, the buffer zone effect applies not only when the militarized international conflict is characterized by war, but also when it is characterized by threats or other forms international crises.

Because of the buffer zone effect, national governments may even have an incentive, or at least tendency, to enter into conflict when dispossessed peoples in border areas may be disproportionately affected. This follows from the notion that destabilizing these areas will make it less likely that dispossessed peoples will be able to mount a meaningful political or military campaign and challenge the authority of the political status quo. Groups in border areas affected by conflict are less able to organize politically or gain economic capital during and, in some cases, for decades following

conflict. In addition, economic investment is discouraged when a border area has a history or high possibility of experiencing conflict. Conflict or crises also provide a compelling excuse for the home state to participate in a full military intervention in areas populated by the dispossessed, which allows the state to assert dominance and increase intelligence and control in the region.

This point is important, especially considering the work of Salehyan (2009). States understand that dispossessed peoples, much like rebel groups, have options regarding who they select as their patrons. International conflict and crises provide an opportunity for host states to signal their authority and strength to these groups to ensure that they are not co-opted by bordering states. Additionally, such conflict can limit the ability of nearby states or extra-state groups to provide finances, weapons and other resources to the dispossessed group. Work by Christopher Gelpi and Graeme Davies (Cashman 2014, 206) also reveals that when there is internal strife, the chances of MIDs increase as part of a diversionary war tactic, especially when that internal strife is violent. Because internal strife often originates from those unincorporated into the state, it is likely that dispossessed groups could be a cause of such strife.

Each of these links culminate in a theoretical chain that bolsters the claim that dispossessed peoples are likely to increase the occurrence of militarized international disputes ranging from threats to all out war. These international crises are accelerated when dispossessed groups exist because of the dual conflict accelerants that they fulfill: territorial disputes and rebellious tendencies. Further, the buffer zone effect helps to eliminate audience costs that are commonly associated with other types of conflicts that do not arise from territorial claims or rebels. The buffer zone effect also helps the state to



arouse nationalistic support that is especially salient when territorial disputes are involved. Additionally, conflict surrounding border areas where dispossessed peoples live allow the state to justify regional intervention and assert dominance, increase control and intelligence, and signal strength to groups who might otherwise attempt secession, co-optation by neighboring states, or transformation into rebel or terrorist groups. Below, I provide a detailed outline of the research design used to test this theory and the data collected to discern the effects of dispossessed peoples on international crises.

### **Research Design and Description of Data Set**

Because of the inherent nature of dispossessed peoples, acquiring detailed and consistent data on crucial indicators regarding their existence has presented a challenge. However, combining data from the Minorities at Risk (MAR) database and the Correlates of War (COW) Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) database, I used a portfolio of variables in order to create a measurement of dispossession.

The MAR database was created to document minorities at risk around the world, including indicators regarding conflict and cultural, political and economic situations for these groups. The database classifies a minority at risk as:

"An ethnopolitical group (non-state communal group) that:  
- collectively suffers, or benefits from, systematic discriminatory treatment vis-à-vis other group in a society; and/or  
- collectively mobilizes in defense or promotion of its self-defined interests" (Minorities at Risk Project 2009).

Additionally, in order to be included in the MAR data, the country in which the MAR resides must have a population of greater than 500,000 or the group itself must have a population larger than 100,000 or 1 percent of the total country population. I first downloaded all MAR data for all MAR groups and non-MAR groups from 1940-2003.

Data from the 2003-2006 period used different indicators and variables, and was not fully compatible with the older dataset and thus was left out of the analysis.

In addition to collecting the MAR data, I collected data from the COW database for all militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) between contiguous states from 1940-2003, including all available variables for that data (Ghosn, Faten, and Scott Bennett 2003). Importantly, MIDs include a variety of hostility levels ranging from threats to war. Thus, the analysis considers international crises rather than international conflict per se, although MIDs may or may not include actual conflict. This data outputs in the form of dyad-years. If two states had borders within 400 miles of each other (over sea) they were considered contiguous.

Next, the MAR dataset and the COW Dyadic MID dataset were combined so that observations could be made. Because the COW data is presented in the form of dyad-years, only one MAR group could be chosen for each side of the dyad in each MID. In order to select one MAR group from each country, I coded the MAR data in order to identify the primary MAR of interest within each country, using a new variable called "Primary Minority". If the group was not the primary MAR in the country, I coded it with a 0. If the group was the primary MAR within that country, I coded it with a 1.

I classified the primary MAR for each country using a two-step process. First, I checked the transnational dispersion of each MAR within each country<sup>1</sup>. If the group was coded as a 0 (no regional base), a 1 (the regional base does not adjoin an international border), or a 99 (no basis for judging), I coded it as a 0 under the new variable, unless there were no MAR groups left within a country after this initial threshold. In such cases,

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<sup>1</sup>The GC9 variable within the Minorities at Risk Database was used for this information.

when countries had no MAR groups with a homeland adjoining an international border, I used solely population levels to determine the Primary Minority group. I did this to avoid a selection bias that left out non-dispossessed groups from the analysis. If the group was a Primary Minority of a given country, it was coded as a 1. If more than one group still remained within any one country after this initial threshold, I then went on to the next step. The second step took population levels into consideration<sup>2</sup>. Out of the remaining MAR groups within a given country, I chose the group with the highest average population level as the Primary Minority group and coded it with a 1 under the new variable.

In countries where only one MAR group existed in a border region, the selection process for the primary MAR was valid because it sought out groups who existed within border regions only. This selection method constituted the majority of primary MAR selections. However, the choice to use population levels to identify the primary MAR in countries with multiple MAR groups in border regions (or none at all) arose more out of necessity than choice. This metric can certainly be improved, especially as geographic indicators in MAR become more detailed. Because more detailed geographic information was not provided in the dataset, I chose to use the next best indicator: population. Larger groups within border areas are more likely to have brethren across an international border and are also more likely to pose a true challenge to the state, thus making them more pertinent to the study at hand. A better selection criterion, if and when a variable of this sort becomes available, would have chosen the MAR group whose regional base was closest in distance to an international border.

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<sup>2</sup> The GPOP variable within the Minorities at Risk Database was used for this information.

After coding for the primary MARs within each country, I imported the variables for each MAR group into the COW Dyadic MID dataset using Stata. I first imported all variables for Country A in each dyad and recoded the MAR variables by adding an "A" onto the end of each MAR variable. I then imported all variables for Country B in each dyad and recoded the MAR variables by adding a "B" onto the end of each MAR variable.

At this point, each country in each dyad was paired with the primary MAR within that country. Any MAR that was not a Primary Minority was dropped from the dataset. The next step in the process involved identifying whether the MAR groups selected for each country were dispossessed or not. In order to do this, I operationalized "dispossessed" using the available MAR variables. To be classified as dispossessed, the group had to meet at least two of the following criteria in any given year under the following variables (Minorities at Risk Project 2009):

- AGDIFFX: The Aggregate Differentials Index Score must be greater than or equal to 9. If the Aggregate Differentials Index Score is 15 or greater, the MAR is automatically classified as dispossessed, other factors need not be considered. If the Aggregate Differentials Index Score is negative, the group is automatically classified as not dispossessed. The maximum possible score under this index is 18.
- POLDIS: The Political Discrimination Index must be either a 3 (Social Exclusion/Neutral Policy) or a 4 (Exclusion/Repressive Policy).
- ECDIS: The Economic Discrimination Index must be either a 3 (Social Exclusion/Neutral Policy) or a 4 (Restrictive Policies).

If the group satisfied at least two of the above criteria and resided in the border region of their home state, the group was coded as dispossessed using a new variable called "Dispossession"<sup>3</sup>.

When this variable was imported into the COW Dyadic MID database, it was divided into two separate variables: dispossessiona1 and dispossessionb1, where

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<sup>3</sup> The groups were coded as 0 if they were not dispossessed and 1 if they were dispossessed under the new variable.

dispossessiona1 signals whether the Primary Minority within the first country in the dyad is dispossessed and dispossessionb1 signals whether the Primary Minority in the second country in the dyad is dispossessed. Finally, I combined these two variables into a primary independent variable that indicated whether either country within the dyad had a dispossessed group<sup>4</sup>.

For some of the indicators used above, data was only provided in 5-year intervals. In other cases, data points were provided only sporadically. In these cases, I used the last available data point and extrapolated that data until the next available data point. Fortunately, there was not an extreme fluctuation in indicators from year to year due to the generally constant nature of the indicators used. Future research might hone these data points by using other forms of interpolation such as multiple regression or omission of years with missing data points. Notably, some groups do shift from dispossessed to not dispossessed from year to year.

I chose to use the above criteria to measure dispossession because these factors are crucial in discerning a wide variety of causes that can result in a group losing political, economic and cultural freedom. These indicators also hint at the existence of systemic and societal attempts to dispossess or, in some cases such as the Alevis in Syria, privilege certain groups. Additionally, the indexes used provide useful insight regarding the limitations that MAR groups face when attempting to build political strength and implement the policies that are important to them. The aggregate differentials index takes into account a broad range of limitations including cultural, political and economic differentials. These differentials account for indicators such as a differences in language,

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<sup>4</sup> This new variable is called "dispossessiontotal" and is coded as a 0 if neither country has a dispossessed group and a 1 if either country has a dispossessed group.

religion, ethnicity, voting rights, equal protection under the law, access to education and property holdings. The economic and political discrimination indexes reveal a systematic governmental or societal attempt to exclude these groups from participation in activities that are easily accessed by other groups who are better incorporated into the overarching regime. This exclusion ensures that the dispossessed remain unincorporated into the state, which can eventually lead to an increased chance of international crises.

There has been some debate amongst scholars regarding the validity of dyad-year analyses. S.E. Croco and T. K Teo (Palmer 2008, 150) propose various negative effects of using dyad-years as a form of analysis. They note that dyad-year analyses may miss important nuances in multilateral and bilateral action and behavior amongst states. However, their argument refers mostly to studies of alliances, alliance formation and alliance cooperation. Additionally, Croco and Teo note that a major problem with dyad-year analyses is that this analysis misses the occurrence of events that happen more than once in a given year.

Croco and Teo go on to agree with the research done by the heralded political scientist Stuart Bremer, who contends that conflict initiation should be viewed as a process rather than one event. This process, according to Bremer, involves various contributing events whose sequence and frequency must be considered holistically. My research cannot possibly account for all the various events that ultimately bring a state into conflict. However, I attempt to test one part of this overall process and use control variables to ensure that other common causes of conflict are accounted for. Although this study does not cover every contributing event within the process of conflict, I hope that

my findings may help to uncover one contributing factor that might be accounted for by other scholars in the future.

### Testing the Hypothesis

To test hypothesis 1, I use the dyadic dispossession variable<sup>5</sup> as the independent variable and the occurrence of any type of MID<sup>6</sup> as the dependent variable. If the existence of a dispossessed group increases the chances of international conflict above the expected average, this shows a positive correlation between the existence of a dispossessed group and MIDs. Because the dependent variable is binary, coded as a 1 or a 0, I used a logistical regression in order to understand the effect of dispossession on MIDs.

### Control Variables

Identifying control variables for international conflict is a much-debated topic amongst scholars. Such factors as a contiguous border, mutual territorial disputes, rivalries, power parity and the absence of a joint democracy are all factors that have been shown to increase the likelihood of international conflict (Cashman 2014, 277). Selecting control variables from such a list can be challenging, and deserves much consideration.

For my analysis, I choose to use a combination of the control variables proposed by Salehyan (2009, 104) and those proposed by Gleditsch, Salehyan and Schultz (2009). Salehyan proposes the use of power ratios, alliance information and the existence of dyadic democracy. The relative power within a dyad has been shown to affect the likelihood of conflict amongst two countries within the dyad. Alliances have also been shown to affect the likelihood of conflict amongst dyads, as alliance portfolio similarities

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<sup>5</sup> This variable is labeled as `dispossessedtotal` in the data set.

<sup>6</sup> This variable is labeled as `cwmid` in the data set.

are certain to make conflict amongst members of a dyad less likely. Finally, countries whose regimes are characterized by democratic processes have been generally proven to face conflict with one another much less often than states that do not have democracies (Russett and Oneal, 2001).

In order to control for power ratios, the COW National Material Capability scores are used. Higher scores signal a greater advantage for the stronger side of the dyad<sup>7</sup>. In order to control for alliances, the global weighted S-score for the dyad is used, which measures the alliance portfolio compatibility of the two countries in the dyad (Signorino and Ritter 1999)<sup>8</sup>. To control for dyadic democracy, the method proposed by Gleditsch, Salehyan and Schultz (2009) is used. The Polity IV dataset (Center for Systemic Peace, 2012) is used to measure the polity scores of each country within the dyad. If either country in the dyad has a polity score of 5 or lower, dyadic democracy does not exist. If both states in the dyad have a polity score of 6 or higher, the control variable indicates the existence of dyadic democracy<sup>9</sup>.

Additionally, the existence of civil wars is used as a control variable. A study conducted by Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz (2009) found that the existence of a civil war in a country makes international conflict involving that country 50 to 80 percent more likely when compared to the baseline. They argue that this increase is not a result of opportunism or diversionary tactics, but rather a result of external states attempting to influence, one way or another, the outcome of the civil war itself (Cashman 2014, 220).

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<sup>7</sup> This data was retrieved using EUGene (Bennett and Stam 2000). The power ratio is computed using the equation  $CINC1/(CINC1+CINC2)$  where CINC1 and CINC2 stand for National Material Capability scores of the first and second country in the dyad, respectively. In the dataset, this is denoted by the control variable BOP1

<sup>8</sup> This control variable is denoted by `s_wt_glo` in the data set.

<sup>9</sup> This control variable is denoted by `politybinary` in the data set.



Because the existence of civil wars increases the likelihood of international conflict, it should be controlled for. In order to do this, the Polity IV dataset (Center for Systemic Peace, 2012) is used to create a variable that indicates whether or not either state in the dyad was experiencing a period of interregnum or transition during the year in question<sup>10</sup>.

Yet another important control variable included in the analysis is the distance, in kilometers, between the capitol cities of both countries in the dyad (Gleditsch). This variable helps to control for proximity issues, which have been shown to affect the likelihood of international conflict, mostly due to increased exposure and interaction between dyads whose states are in close geographic proximity to one another<sup>11</sup>.

Finally, a temporal control variable that controls for duration dependence of MID is included. The importance of controlling for duration dependence when considering cross-section data with a binary dependent variable was first proposed by Beck, Katz and Tucker (1998). This method, in short, utilizes a counter that compounds each year since the occurrence of a MID within each dyad, restarting whenever a new MID occurs<sup>12</sup>.

## **Analysis**

As mentioned, in order to test hypothesis 1, a logistical regression was used, with dispossession as the input variable to observe the effect of dispossession on the outcome variable, the occurrence of militarized interstate disputes<sup>13</sup>. There were a total of 18,378 observations rendered through this logistical regression. The test revealed that, globally,

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<sup>10</sup> This control variable is denoted by *civwar* in the data set. A 1 indicates that at least one state in the dyad was experiencing a transition or interregnum period (indicated by a polity score of -77 and -88, respectively). A 0 indicates that neither state in the dyad was experiencing such a period.

<sup>11</sup> This control variable is denoted by *kmdist* in the data set.

<sup>12</sup> This control variable is denoted by *peaceyears*, *peaceyears2* and *peaceyears3* in the data set. *Peaceyears2* and *peaceyears3* are the squared and cubed results of *peaceyears*, respectively. These variables were created using a Stata program created by Tucker (1999).

<sup>13</sup> The occurrence of militarized interstate disputes is denoted by *cwmid* in the dataset.

dispossession was a statistically insignificant factor in the occurrence of MIDs. Thus, the hypothesis was shown to be incorrect. There are various potential reasons for this outcome. First, it is possible that the method of operationalizing dispossession was too expansive or too limited. A different operationalization of dispossession might lead to very different results. It is also possible that the likelihood of international crises are accounted for by the control variables included, which include a range of indicators commonly associated with conflict. Although it is possible that the theory proposed is entirely incorrect, this is unlikely since dispossessed peoples fulfill two key areas that have been proven to accelerate international conflict.

[See Table 1]

The most likely explanation of this outcome is the reality that dispossessed peoples likely have very different effects on international crises depending on which region of the world is considered. For instance, dispossessed peoples in a region of the world such as the Americas may be less likely to cause international crises because the existence of a major world power, the United States of America, creates a calming effect that is difficult to illuminate when considering contiguous dyads only. In contrast, a dispossessed group in Africa might be more likely to affect international crises because of increased instability in the region and the absence of a significant superpower in the region. In order to explore this possibility, I ran a series of subsequent logistic regressions for each of the five regions of the world included in the COW database. These regions are numbered 1-5 and include Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, North America and South America, respectively.

[See Table 2]

The results of these tests reveal that, in fact, dispossessed peoples do exert a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of international crises in certain regions around the world. In both Europe and Africa, dispossessed peoples exert a positive influence on the likelihood of international crises at a statistical significance level of greater than .005. In North America and South America, dispossessed peoples were shown to increase the likelihood of international crises at a statistically significant level of .05. Interestingly, in the Middle East, dispossessed peoples were shown to exert a net negative effect on the occurrence of international crises, at a statistically significant level of greater than .005. In Asia, the effect of dispossessed peoples on international crises was ambiguous and statistically insignificant.

These findings are especially interesting because they reveal significant regional variations in the manner in which dispossesses peoples influence the likelihood of international conflict. The reasons for this regional variation are difficult to uncover, but there are a multitude of potential reasons for these variations that might be explored further by scholars in the future. In a general sense, one reason for this variation might be that in some regions of the world, territorial claims and the threat of rebels may be more salient causes for international conflict than in other areas of the world. More specific regional differences in conflict resolution patterns and methods of dealing with dispossessed peoples might also cause this variation. A more specific regional breakdown of potential reasons for variations is detailed below.

Europe and Africa were shown to be the regions in which international crises were most significantly increased by the existence of dispossessed peoples. This can be explained by a combination of factors. First, the time period considered ranges from

1940-2003, a time period that covers a series of inter-war and transitional periods in both of these regions. Additionally, Africa was characterized by a lack of a world superpower to exert control over conflicts during a time in which various ethno-political groups were struggling to found states from nations. Meanwhile, Europe (which includes Russia and Eastern European countries), was characterized by the existence of several world superpowers vying for power and myriad national transitions spurred by ethno-political struggles, especially in Eastern Europe in the years leading up to the Cold War until the end of the Cold War. Thus, these regions were struggling with two of the major characteristic indicators of dispossessed peoples: territorial claims and opportunities for rebellion in the form of secession or co-optation by neighboring states.

The statistically significant negative influence of dispossessed peoples on international crises in the Middle East remains a puzzle, one that might be especially interesting for scholars who study this topic in the future. Interestingly, the first time I considered the possibility that dispossessed peoples might influence the occurrence of international crises was through extensive field research in the Middle East, specifically southeastern Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. Ironically, dispossessed peoples in this region are actually shown to decrease the likelihood of international crises. I suspect that one reason for this result is the fact that during the period from 1940-2003, Middle Eastern countries were often preoccupied with internal strife. Additionally, other than the Iraq-Iran War and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, international crises amongst Middle Eastern countries were rather limited during this time period (excluding ongoing conflicts between various Middle Eastern states and Israel). Another explanation harkens back to the possibility that dispossessed peoples may constitute only a small portion of a larger

range of destabilizing forces in the Middle East, thus creating the illusion that their effect on conflict is negative. Yet, these explanations are certainly not expansive enough to explain the negative effect on international crises exerted by dispossessed peoples in the region, making this puzzle all the more intriguing for future study.

Essentially, these results reveal that dispossessed peoples have varying effects on international crises dependent upon the global regions in which they reside. At the core of this finding is the reality that dispossessed peoples are more limited in their ability to genuinely threaten secession and co-optation in certain regions of the world, and are more free to threaten such actions in other regions. In the case of dispossessed peoples then, context matters. The geopolitical landscape of the region and regional balances of power might limit dispossessed peoples' effect on conflict in some cases, and spur it onwards in other cases.

## **Conclusion**

Globally, dispossessed peoples do not exert a statistically significant influence on the occurrence of international crises. However, within specific regions, their effects are statistically significant, confirming the theory that dispossessed peoples do have a discernable effect on the likelihood of international conflict. In regions where methods of controlling and co-opting dispossessed peoples are lacking, their effect is likely increased. This explains regional variations in the influence of dispossessed peoples. These results answer some questions about dispossessed peoples, but the results also create various puzzles that demand further study by scholars.

Future research might clarify and standardize the requirements for a group to be identified as dispossessed. The metric I have devised for measuring whether a group is

dispossessed is one of the first of its kind. Because dispossessed peoples, as I define them, have rarely been studied in the past, the indicators that I selected were somewhat arbitrary and could use further clarification. Additionally, it might be useful for scholars to consider the effect that a technically dispossessed group exerts on conflict when it is located closer to the geographical center of the state. Further, scholars would do well to study how Diaspora communities affect dispossessed peoples, especially when those Diaspora communities are not located in an adjacent state. The existence of Diaspora communities worldwide might make dispossessed peoples more willing and able to gain international attention and develop more expansive coalitions. Finally, future scholars will undoubtedly benefit from a broader range of data, data that will be more accessible, detailed and accurate as time progresses.

One further area of study includes the buffer zone effect. Although only a theoretical link within this study, if true, the buffer zone effect might hold important insights for groups who seek to limit human rights abuses and support marginalized communities. If the buffer zone effect holds up to scrutiny, it reveals an extremely disproportionate burden of force that is primarily borne by dispossessed peoples and other marginalized groups who inhabit border areas. These groups are at a high risk of human rights abuses and long-term destruction of economic, political and cultural resources. By identifying dispossessed peoples as the kernel of this inequality, rights activists and international organizations such as the United Nations might better target their efforts to combat such negative effects. Furthermore, international organizations and non-governmental organizations might be able to assist dispossessed peoples in their

quest to exercise formal political and economic power through legitimate, non-violent means, thus curbing rights abuses and conflict simultaneously.

As noted, this study found that, generally, dispossessed peoples do not increase the likelihood of international crises. However, future scholars might add further texture to this study by considering the effect of Diaspora communities or kindred groups across an adjacent international border. Previous research by scholars such as Woodwell reveals that international conflict is increased when a majority-minority dyad exists. That is, if country A holds a majority of a specific ethnic group and an adjacent country, country B, holds a minority of that same group, international conflict is likely to increase. Future scholars might test this theorem in regard to dispossessed peoples as well. Perhaps if a dispossessed group that is a minority in country A is more likely to incite international crises if a kindred group holds a majority in country B of the dyad. This could be studied empirically using the MAR and COW databases.

It is also my hope that future scholars might continue the effort to understand dispossessed peoples as entities separate and distinct from transnational rebel groups, refugees and terrorist organizations. Because of the range of options accessible to dispossessed peoples, they are in a position that is unique when compared to more commonly studied groups. Dispossessed peoples are also unique because they stand as groups whose ties are predicated on shared ethno-political backgrounds, political rights struggles and demands for economic freedom and mobility. While their formal political and economic power appears weak, they remain an important force in the rise of international crises. To understand how they influence international crises requires study that is far more expansive than what has been done here. Understanding the various

political games and choices available to dispossessed peoples might allow political scientists to better predict their ultimate decisions. Further, this might allow the international community to pursue means of avoiding conflict that originates in the existence of dispossessed peoples.

Finally, this study reveals crucial political lessons for policymakers in states in which dispossessed peoples are found. Although dispossessed peoples are often viewed by leaders within a state as a nuisance that should be minimized through dominance, militarization of border regions and perpetual limitations on political and economic rights, this study shows this notion to be fraught with the risk of international conflict. Instead, states should focus on incorporating dispossessed peoples into the overarching state by providing them with access to equal political rights and the opportunity for economic mobility. Otherwise, the theory proposed above implies that dispossessed peoples will be co-opted by nearby states, or even vie for a country of their own; two pathways that are certain to draw states into a range of international crises. Importantly, there are certain regions where this outcome was not necessarily true, which points to the potential that states within these regions have discovered the importance of co-opting dispossessed peoples rather than attempting to marginalize them further. Dispossessed peoples stand at the crossroads of some of the most important international issues of this era, and understanding them is one step towards solving these issues.



## Appendix

**Table 1: Global Militarized Interstate Disputes (1940-2003)**

Variables	Global
Dispossession (dispossessiontotal)	.079 (.071)
Balance of Power (bop1)	4.216 (2.194)
Distance between capitol cities (in km) (kmdist)	-.000* (.000)
Global Weighted S-score (s_wt_glo)	-.062*** (.022)
Polity IV Polity Score (politybinary)	.121 (.074)
Civil War (civwar)	-.068 (.097)
Peace Years (peaceyears)	-.349*** (.020)
Peace Years Squared (peaceyears2)	.013*** (.001)
Peace Years Cubed (peaceyears3)	-.000*** (.000)
Constant (_cons)	-5.579* (2.194)
Number of Observations	18,378
Log-Likelihood	-3143.9522
Prob > Chi-squared	0.0000

**Table 2: Regional Militarized Interstate Disputes (1940-2003)**

Variables	Region <sup>14</sup>				
	1	2	3	4	5
Dispossession (disposessedtotal)	.610*** (.172)	-.594*** (.186)	.485*** (.164)	-.275 (.165)	.561* (.226)
Balance of Power (bop1)	1.611 (3.609)	70.879* (28.594)	52.043 (38.418)	6.952 (3.686)	58.191*** (19.613)
Distance between capitol cities (in km) (kmdist)	.000 (.000)	-.000*** (.000)	-.000* (.000)	-.000*** (.000)	-.000** (.000)
Regional Weighted S-score (s_wt_re1)	-.245 (.918)	.071 (.079)	-.080 (.042)	-.069 (.043)	-.010 (.072)
Polity IV Polity Score (politybinary)	-.145 (.189)	.565*** (.180)	.122 (.200)	.288 (.158)	.709*** (.210)
Civil War (civwar)	.051 (.257)	-.425* (.170)	-.134 (.231)	-.541* (.220)	.697* (.346)
Peace Years (peaceyears)	-.426*** (.050)	-.343*** (.047)	-.256*** (.050)	-.311*** (.042)	-.284*** (.046)
Peace Years Squared (peaceyears2)	.018*** (.003)	.014*** (.003)	.010* (.004)	.011*** (.003)	.010*** (.003)
Peace Years Cubed (peaceyears3)	-.000*** (.000)	-.000*** (.000)	-.000 (.000)	-.000** (.000)	-.000*** (.000)
Constant (_cons)	3.589 (3.642)	-71.628* (28.608)	-53.855 (38.463)	-7.449* (3.691)	60.444*** (19.586)
Number of Observations	5,631	2,739	4,168	2,509	3,331
Log-Likelihood	583.2543	643.7898	669.0099	669.3512	450.9915
Prob > Chi-squared	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

\*\*\*Significant at .005 level; \*\*Significant at .001 level; \*Significant at .05 level

<sup>14</sup> Region 1 is Europe, Region 2 is the Middle East, Region 3 is Africa, Region 4 is Asia, Region 5 is North America and South America

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